

ABBIE LINCOLN



TALKING TO THE SUN

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Abbey Lincoln

Vocal

Steve Coleman

Alto Sax

James Weidman

Piano

Billy Johnson

Bass

Mark Johnson

Drums

Jerry Gonzalez

Percussion

Arlene Knox

Backup Vocal

Bemshee Shirer

Backup Vocal

Naima Williams

Backup Vocal

Produced by Horst Weber and Matthias Winkelmann

Recorded by David Baker at Classic Sound,
NYC, November, 1983

Photography by Scott Sternbach

Design by Elisabeth Winkelmann

ADD

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO

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In the studio, a strikingly beautiful woman began, in music but without words, to express rage. The fury, the frustration, the deep song in those cries, stunned all the musicians in the room — from Coleman Hawkins to the young Booker Little. The woman was Abbey Lincoln; the rage was part of Max Roach's **Freedom Now Suite** which I was recording for the long since departed Candid label. Abbey did more that day, and on a subsequent album of her own, to finally and totally demolish the initial "image" of her that had emerged in the music business. Born in Chicago, brought up in Michigan, she first acquired a following as a "supper club singer". These are performers who do not have to sing with any particular distinctiveness, but they do have to be very attractive, very sensuous. They are on exhibit.

This role became increasingly uncomfortable for Abbey Lincoln, all the more so after she met Max Roach who began to expand her listening horizons as well as her desire to say more, to be more, in her music. And so, Abbey began to record as a jazz singer with such deeply challenging musicians as Sonny Rollins, Kenny Dorham, Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers and Max Roach. (One such session was **That's Him** on Riverside, recently reissued.) Three years later came the **Freedom Now Suite** and her own set, **Straight Ahead**, also on Candid.

In the 1960's, Abbey continued to be a singularly compelling element in the jazz scene, but also appeared in movies, one of which was the lyrically successful "For Love of Ivy" (1968), co-starring Sidney Poitier.

More and more, however, Abbey was becoming less interested in the traditional trappings of "stardom" and more involved in finding her own roots, personal and cultural. She expended considerable energy and time in groups working to develop black political and cultural consciousness, and she also became immersed in studying the historic contributions of black women through time. All of this led increasingly to her appreciation of the vital importance of Africa, past and present. Abbey travelled to that continent and during a 1975 visit, she was given the name Aminata by the president of Guinea, and the surname of Moseka by the Minister of Education in Zaire.

After some years in California, Abbey, some two years ago, made New York her base of operations—both as a singer and as the star and orchestrator of a one-woman show, "Talkin' to the Sun", with accompanying musicians, singers and dancers.

This album for ENJA, she says, is "...finally my music. I conceived it; I'm the bandleader; I chose every song on the album; the arrangements are mine; and I selected the musicians."

The essence of the music is the essence of Abbey Lincoln—*independence, freedom*. As she told Bob Catalotti, jazz writer of the Rocky Mountain News (Denver, Colorado): "Everything I sing about deals with some kind of freedom. Mostly it's the freedom of the spirit. I'm not complaining against anybody. These are songs that deal with my own personal freedom of the spirit."

The River is by Abbey, "I used to live on Venice boulevard in Los Angeles", she recalls. "It's a really busy freeway and I use to hear all this traffic in the night and in the morning. It sounded just like a river."

Whistling Away the Dark was written by Johnny Mercer and Henry Mancini. "It says exactly what I wanted to say. I didn't know Mercer and Mancini had addressed that kind of subject matter. "I expect anyone will find

in this song—especially in the way Abbey makes it real—memories like hers.

Talking to the Sun is a song by Abbey based on a conversation she once had with a friend of hers from Ghana. "He was telling me how he used to talk to the sun late every day in a special place he had found. Well, there came a time when, after he had studied to be a lawyer, he couldn't find a job. He had done everything he was supposed to, but still no job. After seven days, he dreamed the sun was standing behind him. The next day he went to that spot where he used to talk to the sun, and he saw plants he had never seen before. The sun had opened his eyes. So, from the law, he went into raising these beautiful plants." The song itself, says Abbey, is about a man modeled after the sun. "He's like total man, the sun personified, part of him being expressed in one man, part in another."

Stevie Wonder's **You and I** was brought to Abbey by a young singer. "I fell in love with it," she says, "because it's a beautiful story of the need people have for one another. We are in this life together, so we might as well fall in love."

The powerfully affecting **People in the Street** comes, like all of Abbey's songs, from personal experience. "Where I lived in California," she says, "I'd see old ladies in rags on the street. Then I came to New York, and I saw bagladies—homeless women living out of whatever they could carry around in bags. "I thought: what's wrong with everybody? We must all be crazy. If we keep on ignoring how these people are being treated, we'll be next. We don't have long to fix this." And in her interview with the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, Abbey said: "I cried a lot when I was writing the song. It does diminish us when we see ourselves lying on the sidewalk and on the park benches."

You're My Thrill is a song Abbey has been singing for the last twenty years. The recorded version that first directed her toward the song was that of Billie Holiday. Here, as on every track, there are the distinctive characteristics of Abbey Lincoln's style: the penetrating, incisive, emotionally reverberating sound; the speech-like rhythms; and the thrust of an independent spirit for whom song is life.

The Villa-Lobos **Prelude (A Wedding Song)**, with lyrics by Abbey, first came into her consciousness years ago when Max Roach, while courting her, would play a recording of the original. "I wrote these lyrics," she added, "but never recorded or used them. The piece itself, as rhythms were added on to it, went to another place and gradually became more Eastern in flavor."

As for the resilient, attentive combo behind her, Abbey emphasized in her Rocky Mountain News interview: "It's the best band I've had yet. They're all virtuoso musicians, but there's a sympathetic (collective) thing musically. I want to tour with the musicians on this album. These players don't bring bitterness into their music; they're fresh in sound and in conception. They've been with me a year and a half, and I hope we keep going on."

Through the years Abbey's singing has become stronger, deeper and more personal. For all its force, she seems very much at ease with herself these nights. All that energy and honesty and desire for justice have been focused into her music. All her fire is concentrated now. "I'm thankful for the music," she told me. "The music takes care of me. If I didn't have my music, I don't know what I'd do." The commitment is total; the results stay in the mind long after the performance is over, for this is more than a performance. It's a life being continually reflected upon.

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Talking To the Sun

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ABBEY LINCOLN TALKING TO THE SUN

1. THE RIVER (Abbey Lincoln) 4:57

2. WHISTLING AWAY THE DARK (Mercer / Mancini) 4:29

3. TALKING TO THE SUN (Abbey Lincoln) 5:44

4. YOU AND I (Stevie Wonder) 3:55

5. PEOPLE ON THE STREET (Abbey Lincoln) 5:53

6. YOU'RE MY THRILL (Gorney / Clare) 5:59

7. PRELUDE - A WEDDING SONG (Villa-Lobos / Lincoln) 8:25

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Bass

Arlene Knox

Backup Vocal

Steve Coleman

Alto Sax

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(H. Villa-Lobos, Lyrics A. Lincoln)

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PRODUCED BY HORST WEBER & MATTHIAS WINCKELMANN

#1, #3, #5, and #7 publ. by Mosaka Music/BMI (ENJA/GEMA)

#2 publ. by Famous Music Corp (Melodie der Welt/GEMA); #4 publ. by Black Bull Music (Francis, Day and Hunter/GEMA); #6 publ. by Movietone Music Corp. (United Artists Mus.GEMA)

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